

I'd like to start out by thanking Professor Coleman and Professor Doss for the opportunity to speak today.

I read the newspaper a lot, so I guess it's only fitting that I'd start out my comments today with a response to an op-ed. Bret Stephens recently wrote an opinion piece in the *Wall Street Journal* that was heavily critical of the class of 2012. Stephens contends that the diploma that we will receive on Sunday is a mere document of four years of an expensive pursuit of a worthless degree. Stephens believes that the class of 2012 is fatally unknowledgeable, uncompetitive, lazy, and unable to think for themselves.

I believe any American Studies major at Notre Dame would easily be able to rebuff Stephen's contentions. The defining characteristic of American Studies majors is a sheer enthusiasm for their coursework, which leads to an atmosphere of excitement and engagement within each classroom. And this excitement exists beyond O'Shag or DeBartolo. How many business majors do you know who talk about a recent *New York Times* op-ed while in line for the bathroom at Finny's?

This is not solely to credit the students, as we have been encouraged by professors who generally want to know what we think, and who provide us with classes that offer us the opportunity to both attain knowledge and articulate our beliefs. American Studies courses are challenging because you have to engage with the material in a variety of ways. American Studies professors encourage their students to innovate their own approaches to issues. This process is both exciting and helpful to peers.

Lastly, I'd like to credit the parents for supporting your child through his or her undergraduate career. A lot of my friends in other majors were discouraged by their parents from pursuing a course of study that they were interested in because it might not immediately translate to employment after college. I'm sure quite a few parents were disquieted after their child announced their plans to be an American Studies major. But I hope through your child's engagement with his or her coursework you've seen how important it is to be zealous about a class or by an idea rather than trudging through an

endless stream of textbooks. Throughout my undergraduate career, I learned from my parents that it is more important to enjoy the course you're on while you're on it than to blindly force yourself to do something for a materialistic end. If you're avidly involved in something that makes you happy, you'll be successful in a more fulfilling way.

American Studies, to me, provides an ability to develop a uniquely critical and intellectual eye for the American cultural landscape. We think for ourselves. We're ready to weather whatever comes our way after we leave Notre Dame. I'd like to leave everyone with a piece of writing oft quoted by Professor Meissner. Though he's not an American writer, I believe Samuel Beckett sums up what our mindset should be as we explore American after Notre Dame:

Ever Tried. Ever Failed,

No Matter.

Try Again. Fail again.

Fail better.